Interim Evaluation of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

Introduction

The interim evaluation of the Southwest Education Development Laboratory was conducted in Austin, TX, May 10-14, 1999. The purpose of this interim evaluation was to assess the performance of the Lab in the first three years of the contract cycle and to guide program improvements during the remainder of the contract terms.

In preparation for the evaluation, I reviewed all materials provided to me by the Lab through DIR. In addition, I documented information provided to the evaluation panel by Lab personnel, board members, and clients during presentation, interview and question and answer sessions. My review of materials and documentation of comments from personnel, board and clients were used in responding to this evaluation.

I.   Brief Overview of Laboratory

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory is an "original."   SEDL has been in existence since the Lab system was initiated in 1966. At its inception, SEDL served the states of Louisiana and Texas. In 1978, membership in SEDL was extended to Arkansas, Mississippi, New Mexico and Oklahoma. In 1985, Mississippi became part of the newly formed Southeast Education Lab. Since 1985, SEDL has been the regional Lab for the states of Texas, New Mexico, Louisiana, Arkansas and Oklahoma.

For this five-year contract cycle, SEDL's goals focus on the following:

- Enhance family and community involvement in education

- Address diversity: Language and culture

- Align and support policy development

- Promote instructional coherence

- Apply technology to restructuring and learning

- Change the organization and management of schooling

II.   Implementation and Management

A.   To what extent is the REL doing what they were approved to do during the first three contract years?

Given OERI approval of multiple requests for modifications of the original RFP, SEDL generally meets expectations in terms of doing what they were approved to do during the first three year contract years. However, success in meeting expectations is not readily apparent in all goal areas. A major restructuring of the Lab and programs resulted in delays in accomplishing some REL initiatives. The administrative leadership team recognizes this concern but appears confident that all areas will be "back on target" during the fourth year. To some degree, the accomplishments of the REL initiatives appear to be a "work in process."   Completing the contractual obligations is and will be a challenge for SEDL.

1. Strengths

- Able and visionary executive leadership

- Sound structures to manage the REL contract

- Comprehensive needs assessment process

- Intensive focus on identified populations

Able and visionary executive leadership

The executive leadership is able and visionary in my view. Support for this view is found in the restructuring of the organization initiated by the leadership and the recent hiring by the leadership of talented staff with expertise in diverse but appropriate backgrounds. These two leadership actions are enabling SEDL to become a client-focused organization with the flexibility to respond to changing needs and to target staff work to increase the impact on the accomplishment of major initiatives.

The current executive director was hired in 1997 following the retirement of the former chief executive officer. Although a national search was conducted, the chief executive officer was selected from within the SEDL organization. In fact, the chief executive officer had a 26-year history of working within SEDL. Despite his long history with SEDL, the chief executive officer, with the support of the Governing Board, initiated a major internal review of all SEDL programs. The internal review was followed by a compensation study in response to board concerns that SEDL was "too top-heavy" in administration.

As a result of the internal review and compensation study, a major restructuring was completed of programs and staff positions. The restructuring appears to have enabled the Lab leadership to begin to realize its vision of a client-responsive and future focused organization. This vision is in contrast to that of the former executive leadership who is quoted as saying his purpose was, "To keep the ship from going down on my watch."

While painful and disruptive, the restructuring seems to have been appropriate. The executive leadership of both the governance board and SEDL management suggest that the restructuring moved the organization from one whose focus was solely on fulfilling its contractual obligations to an organization that more readily responds to changing needs and

circumstances. Additionally, there is evidence that the restructuring and new executive leadership are enabling SEDL staff members to work in a more collaborative manner.

Two examples illustrate the ways in which this restructuring effort is reflected in Lab work.

- The original proposal for work with the Collaborative Action Team project focused on the short-term goal of building action teams without regard to the long-term need to sustain them. In response to the internal review of the CAT, the focus changed from one of building teams to developing capacity in teams so that teams could be sustained when SEDL staff completed their work with the team.

- The original work with the Technology Assistance Project focused on technology planning. In response to customer needs and to avoid duplication with other REL's work, the project was refocused to assist teachers to improve teaching and learning with the support of technology.

Two examples also illustrate the ways in which capable and expert staff have been hired to accomplish the major initiatives of SEDL.

- The executive vice president and chief operating officer, who was hired approximately one and one-half years ago, has twenty-five years experience in working within the regional education Laboratories system. She possesses a sound foundation in research and development as well as expertise in managing Lab operations in an effective and efficient manner.

- New staff has been hired to support implementation of the TAP and CAT. This staff represents a variety of expertise. Experience of staff include urban planning, partnership work, training and evaluation. Several staff members also are multilingual. Additionally, staff is assigned to the projects in which their expertise is of significant benefit.

Sound structures to manage the work of SEDL and the REL contract

Sound structures have been put in place to manage the work of SEDL and REL contract. Specifically, these include:

- SEDL Management Council which meets twice a month to discuss issues and share information concerning the overall management of the organization. Members include the chief executive officer, chief operating officer, and the chief financial officer, directors, program managers and the assistant to the CEO.

- SEDL REL Management Council which also meets twice a month to focus specifically on the work of the REL contract. Members include the chief operating officer, program managers and the director of evaluation and chief financial officer.

- Staff meeting which occur monthly as informational meetings.

- Task forces which are established to address specific purposes, such as compensation study, facilities remodeling and performance appraisal system.

- SEDL Links which is a new bi-monthly publication designed to inform governing board members, staff and other key communicators of SEDL's work.

- Goal/project meetings which are called as appropriate.

- Electronic communication which includes email and intranet to ensure communication among staff.

Comprehensive Needs Assessment Process

SEDL employs a comprehensive needs assessment process which was used to develop the original proposal for this five year contract year period. The process includes "needs sensing" and involves use of environmental scanning, focus groups, telephone and pencil and paper surveys as well as board assessment and review. This needs assessment process is an integral part of the REL Planning Process and directs strategic decision-making, and program design.

Intensive focus on identified populations

SEDL directs resources, financial and personnel, specifically to those populations targeted for REL assistance in the original proposal. These include the students and families most "at risk" within the region. Although Texas comprises ½ the students and ¾ of the teachers in the region, resources are distributed to those areas most in need, including the border area of Texas, the Delta of Arkansas and Mississippi, the rural and urban areas across the region and the Native American nations and groups. The executive leadership screens districts receiving services to ensure their designation as "at risk."

2. Areas of Improvement

- Vacant leadership positions

- Reliance upon REL and U.S. Department of Education funding

- Cross-training and collaboration among SEDL staff

Vacant leadership positions

As a result of retirements and restructuring, two critical positions are unfilled. Specifically, positions that remain unfilled are the program manager for the REL's goal 2 and the Lab's specialty area, language and diversity and the program manager of the Office of Evaluation and Policy Service. Program manager for the Office of Evaluation and Policy Service is a new position, required for leadership and supervision of additional staff and work being targeted toward evaluation.

SEDL's executive leadership acknowledges the importance of both positions. Moreover, they are critically aware of the need for leadership in language and diversity for **this** Lab in **this** region. SEDL has a particular commitment to work in language and diversity. While RELs could submit multiple applications for specialty area, SEDL submitted only language and diversity.

Several efforts of recruiting and hiring have been unsuccessful. SEDL plans to convene an expert group to devise strategies to assist in successful recruitment and hiring of an appropriate leader in this area. SEDL has successfully hired other, expert staff in leadership roles. This position must not remain vacant.

Recommendation: SEDL should explore every opportunity to fill both positions. Until hiring is completed in evaluation and language and diversity, interim solutions for leadership must be developed.

Reliance on REL and U.S. Department of Education funding

SEDL is heavily reliant upon funding from the REL contract and the U.S. Department of Education. Specifically, 98 percent of the SEDL funding is represented by these two sources. In fact, sixty percent comes from the REL contract, 13 percent from the Eisenhower Math-Science and 20 percent from the Comprehensive Resource Center funding. The executive leadership states an interest in seeking diversification in funding. Board officers express a range of concern for the importance of diversification. The benefit to SEDL in diversification of funding is ability to use additional funds from other sources to leverage the impact of the REL funding.

Recommendation: SEDL should make every effort to explore opportunities to diversify funding to lessen the reliance on REL contract and U.S. Department of Education funding.

Cross-training and collaboration among SEDL staff

SEDL staff report that opportunities to work together and to learn what one another are doing has been made possible by the change in executive leadership. While these opportunities are just being made possible, they should be encouraged and nurtured to increase the possibility of co-development and collaboration among SEDL staff. Much of SEDL's work has implications for all products and services. SEDL's impact can be increased by providing opportunities for Lab staff to work and learn together.

Recommendation: SEDL should encourage and systematically support opportunities for cross training and collaboration among SEDL staff.

B. **To what extent is REL using a self-monitoring process to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs?**

SEDL meets expectations in use of a self-monitoring process to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customers needs. On an on-going basis, the self-monitoring process

includes a Quality Assurance Process that is applied to the majority of products, a management structure which provides for frequent monitoring (discussed previously) and an evaluation plan for each project. During this contract cycle, a comprehensive internal review was conducted of all programs as well.

1. **Strengths**

   - Staff Involvement in Quality Assurance Process

   - Use of Feedback

   - Internal Review Process

Staff involvement in quality assurance process

All appropriate SEDL staff is involved in the on-going quality assurance process. The process appears to be articulated and regularly practiced. The following statistics are helpful to demonstrate the use of the Quality Assurance Process: 1996--23 reviews of 17 products; 1997, 26 reviews of 19 products and in 1998, 44 reviews of 38 products.

Participation in the process is part of a staff member's regular assignment. Unit managers or lead developers request reviews for products. Members of the review team provide feedback and make suggestions to the unit managers/lead developers. Generally, products receive two reviews prior to receiving final approval.

When the items receive final approval, they are forwarded for review to the COTR. If there is no response from the COTR over a three week period, it is assumed that the product has received approval. Additionally, external reviews are sought when it is determined to be appropriate.

If there is disagreement in the review process, a facilitator attempts to resolve the conflict. If the conflict remains unresolved, the issue is referred to the REL Management

Council. If the conflict continues, the issue is referred to the chief operating officer for resolution. According to the executive leadership, such conflicts rarely occur. In fact, the leadership could recall only one instance for the need of resolution of disagreement.

Use of feedback

Two examples demonstrate SEDL's use of feedback. Several instances of changes in the development of the TAP were noted based on both the quality assurance process and external review. CAT staff members also noted revisions in products submitted by them to the Quality Assurance Team.

Internal Review Process

SEDL was restructured both in terms of program design and staff assignment in response to a comprehensive internal review conducted in 1997. The internal review process required a large commitment of resources of time and expertise. The internal review is clearly a major form of self-monitoring used by SEDL in this contract cycle.

2. Areas of Improvement

- Comprehensive data base

- External review

- Leadership in evaluation

Comprehensive data base

From my perspective, SEDL's self-monitoring efforts could benefit from development of a comprehensive data base that includes comparative data regarding quality assurance and other pertinent evaluation issues, across projects. Currently, quality assurance and performance indicators related to client satisfaction and use of products and services are reported in terms of each project. Data that provided comparative information could assist in informing the

development of specific projects based learnings from all products and services.

Recommendation: SEDL should consider the development of a comprehensive data base include comparative data regarding quality assurance and other evaluation information across projects.

External review

Despite the fact that this REL contract cycle does not require external review, I believe SEDL's quality assurance process could benefit from systematic use of external reviews. From time to time, SEDL employs external reviews as part of the quality assurance process. Generally, a manager requests such a review. Additionally, two University based professors perform an institutional review. Use of external review of this nature should continue. However, SEDL would likely benefit from development a systematic procedure for external reviews.

Recommendation: SEDL should consider development of a systematic procedure for external review.

Leadership in evaluation

The executive leadership acknowledges the importance of effective evaluation, both of the organization and individual projects. As result, the leadership has created a new position dedicated solely to evaluation and policy issues. Such leadership could provide coordination and supervision of research and evaluation efforts and enable SEDL to determine the value and impact of what they do. SEDL would be strengthened through the hiring of a leader in evaluation. However, the position remains unfilled.

Recommendation: SEDL should select a leader for evaluation as soon as possible.

III.   Quality

To what extent is SEDL developing high quality products and services?

SEDL is developing high quality products and services in several areas. For example, users of the two signature works reviewed for this evaluation indicate high satisfaction with the quality of products and services provided by SEDL. These two signature works provide a means of describing the ways in which SEDL is succeeding in the development of quality products and services.

The two signature works include the Technology Assistance Program and the Collaborative Action Teams. While the CAT builds on prior work completed in a previous five year contract cycle, the TAP was begun with the contract cycle.

1. Strengths

- Exemplary model of applied research/development

- Selection criteria for identification of intensive sites

Exemplary model of applied research/development

The CAT and TAP serve as exemplary models of applied research and development. They possess several common characteristics, as follows.

- Research base well documented and research methodology well grounded.

- Staff actively involved at site level as well as in Laboratory research and activity.

- Products reviewed through Quality Assurance along with some external review.

- Projects revised as the result of SEDL's internal review study and feedback from clients.

- Staffing increased to ensure completion of the project tasks.

Use of selection criteria for identification of intensive sites

SEDL has identified factors that must be in place for successful implementation of site-based projects. Wisely, SEDL has used this knowledge in identification of sites for pilot and field testing of products. Commitment and accountability for successful implementation become a shared responsibility. This enhances the possibilities for success and reduces instances of failure caused by factors over which SEDL has no control. In addition, it supports SEDL in its efforts to build capacity within projects to enable sites to sustain successful implementation when direct support from SEDL is not longer available.

For example, with the TAP project, SEDL has determined that the sites with which it works must comply with requirements such as the following:

- Committed leadership and teaching staff

- Adequate technology

- Openness to or evidence of willingness to implement student centered learning environments

Commitment to the selected criteria is documented in writing prior to the site becoming a SEDL participant. Parameters of operation are clearly articulated at the very beginning and compliance with these may be reviewed at any time.

2. Areas of Improvement

- Diversity of Staff

- Increased emphasis on student success data

Diversity of Staff

SEDL has successfully increased staffing for these two signature works to include expertise from diverse but appropriate perspectives. However, staffing does not adequately

reflect the ethnic, linguistic and racial diversity representative of the regions served. Efforts to seek qualified staff representative of the groups served should be continued.

Recommendation: SEDL should continue to explore ways to increase staff to reflect the ethnic diversity representative of the region.

Increased emphasis on student success data

A variety of data is being collected. These data include journal records, field notes, classroom observations, self-assessments, anecdotal records and standardized student success data. However, this data is not yet compiled and available for interpretation. SEDL has indicated its intent to compile and interpret data from these sources.

Users of the products indicated their need for such data to support continued use of the products/processes. To some extent, users are also responsible for collection and use of data to determine impact. SEDL recognizes that data of this nature is critical to evaluation of the impact of these two signature works. Ability to scale up these projects will rely heavily on the availability of such data.

Recommendation: SEDL is encouraged both to compile and interpret alternative types of data and to encourage school districts and schools to collect and use data to assist in determination of the impact on student success of the signature works and other SEDL products and services.

IV.   Utility

A.   To what extent are the products and services provided by SEDL useful to and used by customers?

Data from 1997 indicate that SEDL products were provided to 532,627 clients and services to 994 clients.   SEDL clients indicate that SEDL's products and services are both useful to and used by clients. In discussions with selected clients, the only request was for more—more products and services. In surveys, more than 80 percent of clients reported that Laboratory products and services were useful in enhancing their knowledge, skills and professional work.

1. Strengths

- SEDL products and services are available in a variety of modes, including electronic.

- SEDL collects data on a consistent basis to determine utility of products and services.

SEDL products and services are available in print, increasingly in both Spanish and English, video, audio and in electronic mode to meet the needs of its client base.

SEDL collects data on a consistent basis to determine utility of products and services.

SEDL consistently collects both formal and informal data to determine the usefulness of its products and services. Formal, survey data is complied and reviewed for its usefulness. Informal data is also given credence. SEDL refers to those with whom it works at sites as co-developers. As such, SEDL clients have on-going and significant input into the development of products and services.

2. Areas of Improvement

- Alignment with state/district initiatives

In discussions, selected SEDL clients indicated a need for assistance in aligning use of SEDL products and services with state/district initiatives that they are required to implement. SEDL could improve the utility of products and services by ensuring alignment of those products and services with state/district initiatives. SEDL could also support its intent to build capacity by developing strategies to assist clients in making and understanding the connections between state/district initiatives and SEDL products and services.

Recommendation: SEDL should consider development of strategies to assist clients in aligning use of SEDL products and services with state/district initiatives.

B.   To what extent is the REL focused on customer needs?

SEDL regularly determines client needs--formally and informally. SEDL staff also offer many examples of ways in which they respond to client needs.

1. Strengths

- SEDL collects data on a consistent basis to determine if client needs are being met.

- SEDL products and services are revised to meet client needs.

SEDL collects data on a consistent basis to determine if client needs are being met.

Formally, SEDL seeks client feedback through a survey of project participants. In these surveys, participants are asked to rate the extent to which they believe the project activities are working toward the stated outcomes. Additionally, SEDL formally conducts a survey of client satisfaction. In 1997, 94 percent of those responding rated the quality of SEDL products and services as excellent. Finally, SEDL formally conducts a survey of partnerships to assess the sense of significance and impact of SEDL products and services. In 1997, 97 percent of respondents reported that the partnerships addressed significant concerns or expanded the capacity of participants.

SEDL also collects data based on on-going interactions with those whom it serves. This data includes field notes, classroom observations, journal entries, and conversation.

SEDL products and services are revised to meet client needs.

SEDL appears to make consistent efforts to respond to client needs. For example, the TAP has been revised several times in response to client feedback. Examples, of revisions to projects based on client feedback and statement of need may be seen in the CAT, Organizing Diversity and other products.

2. Areas of Improvement

Documentation of response

SEDL could benefit from compiling and maintaining documentation of its responses to client feedback and statement of need. This information could be of use in illustrating its responsiveness to regional concerns and determining the value of its impact. Further, such objective data would increase SEDL's reliance on "hard" data rather than the more readily available "soft" or anecdotal data.

Recommendation: SEDL should consider documenting its responses to clients' statement of need.

IV.   Outcomes and Impact

A.   To what extent is SEDL's work contributing to improved student, particularly in intensive sites?

SEDL's focus is on changing various components of the educational system to improve student success. SEDL is collecting data appropriate to its goals/focus.

1. **Strengths**

- SEDL is collecting data appropriate to its goals/focus.

In the TAP and the Professional Learning Communities Project this focus is translated into changing teacher and staff behavior. These projects are directed towards improving teaching and learning by staff. Improvements in teaching and learning, it is hypothesized will improve student success. Similarly in the CAT, SEDL's focus is on building collaborative action teams of parents, school and community. Involving and even empowering parents and community in school and other related issues, it is assumed, will improve student success.

In both instances, a strong research base supports these hypotheses. Data is being collected to illustrate changes in teacher and staff behavior and progress in developing collaborative action teams. Data is also being collected to document how to change teacher and staff behavior and to build and sustain collaborative action teams. In addition, there are plans for SEDL to collect a variety of student achievement or success data. While student success data will be helpful in determining the impact of SEDL's efforts, collection and interpretation of such data is appropriately a joint responsibility of SEDL and schools/districts. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of.

2. **Areas of Improvement**

- Train/help sites collect/analyze student success data as part of SEDL participation

Student success data is critical to determining the impact of programs and activities implemented by a school/district. As such, responsibility for collection and use of that data lies with school/districts. SEDL should include training for school personnel involved in SEDL projects to collect and analyze student success data. Such training would build capacity and support schools/districts in appropriately responding to their mission and responsibilities.

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Such data would also be useful to begin to determine the impact of the SEDL implementations.

Recommendation: SEDL should consider requiring site involvement in collection and analyses of student success data for school/district personnel in intensive sites.

B.   To what extent does SEDL assist states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies?

SEDL assist states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies in two ways. First, SEDL through its on-going work with such projects as TAP and CAT, supports comprehensive school improvement in those sites with which it works. To the extent that SEDL projects impact the ways entire schools organize for teaching and learning, SEDL provides assistance in comprehensive school improvement strategies to the sites with which it works.

Second, SEDL through the goal 6 staff provides specific support to states and localities to develop comprehensive school reform demonstration programs. The CSRDP is a federally funded initiative that will provide $150 million for local schools to implement comprehensive school reform programs. Schools are required to select from among a list of 44 models identified by the REL Network. It is anticipated that the SEDL region will receive funding for approximately 270 CSRDPs.

SEDL staff has long been engaged in work related to assisting schools and school districts in successfully implementing change in schools. This expertise is of particular assistance to states and localities as they develop plans for CSRDP implementation. As a result, SEDL staff has assisted each state in the region in development of its plans for CSRDP implementation.

1. Strengths

- All REL contract goal areas involve SEDL in working with sites to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies**.**

- SEDL staff possesses expertise in successfully implementing school change. As a result, they are proving to be of great assistance to states and localities in development of plans for implementation of comprehensive school reform demonstration programs.

2. Areas of Improvement

- Use of expertise within Lab

SEDL would benefit from use of expertise within Lab to inform all REL contract goal implementation. SEDL possesses talented staff with expertise in many different areas. Additional opportunities for staff collaboration on REL contract goal implementation would increase the potential effective of SEDL's actions. For example, use of the CBAM (change) model could contribute to effective implementation of the Lab restructuring efforts.

Recommendation: Increase collaborative opportunities for Lab staff to inform all REL contract goal implementation.

C. **To what extent has SEDL made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its specialty area?**

Lack of leadership in the area of language and diversity, SEDL's specialty area has hampered SEDL's efforts in this area. Collaboration with the two other Labs with the same specialty area has not proven fruitful as each Lab has different interests related to language and diversity. Currently, SEDL has not achieved a regional nor national reputation in its specialty area.

1. Strengths

- Capable staff

- Work going forward under less than optimal conditions

Capable staff

Despite the lack of leadership, SEDL possesses capable and committed staff who is prepared to develop skills to meet the demands of the current research and development agenda. Previously, most of this staff was involved in training of teachers and staff. This staff appears to be willing and able.

Work going forward under less than optimal conditions

The language and diversity staff is meeting commitments of the REL contract goals although conditions are not optimal. Several projects, such as a Native Education Resources Guide, have been completed and others, such as Organizing for Diversity, are in appropriate stages of development.

Additionally, SEDL has abandoned projects that because of changing external circumstances are not feasible. For example, the REL contract goal activities in this area called for a bi-national school to support schooling for students crossing daily from Mexico into Texas for school. As a result of stricter enforcement on border crossings, the students were restricted from attending school in Texas and the project became unfeasible. This selectivity is targeting resources to projects ensures that resources are placed where they have the best opportunity to make a difference.

2. **Areas of Improvement**
- Specialty area synonymous with SEDL
- Integration of specialty area across all Lab projects and operations
- Leadership

Specialty area synonymous with SEDL

As SEDL's specialty area, language and diversity should become synonymous with SEDL. The vision for the Lab should include language and diversity at its core. Every effort should be made to ensure that SEDL is a leader in this area.

Recommendation: Leadership in the areas of language and diversity should become synonymous with SEDL.

Integration of specialty area across all Lab projects and operations

Because language and diversity is its specialty area, SEDL should integrate language and diversity throughout all Lab projects and operations. Attention to language and diversity should become an integral part of all aspects of SEDL.

Recommendation: SEDL should integrate its specialty area into all Lab projects and operations.

Leadership

Recommendations have already been made for recruitment and hiring of strong leadership in the language and diversity specialty area. This action is imperative.

Recommendation: SEDL should recruit and hire leadership for language and diversity.

VI.   Overall Evaluation of Total Laboratory Programs, Products and Services

SEDL has developed many useful and high quality programs, products and services in the contract cycle. However, it is difficult to achieve an overall view of the Lab's programs, products and services as much of the data collection is completed in response to specific programs, products and services. I have reviewed reports of data collected on responses from participants in the CAT and the TAP. These users of the products rate them as high quality and

useful.

The lack of an overall perspective on the Lab's programs, products and services leads me to describe these useful and high quality programs, products and services as "random acts of improvement or quality."

SEDL has an opportunity to create high quality programs, products and services that distinguish it from other regional educational Labs. When asked what SEDL programs, products and services give it prominence among the regional Lab network, personnel often referred to programs, products and services developed in the 1970's. Certainly, the work of Shirley Hord in the change process is well known. Other staff should be nurtured and trained to become the Shirley Hord's of the next century.

VII. Broad Summary of Strengths, Areas for Improvement and Strategies for Improvement

SEDL is a Lab in the midst of implementing painful organizational change. This change appears to be appropriate and needed. With this organizational change, the Lab executive leadership has set a new and more challenging measure of success for the Lab. Previously, it appears that success in the Lab could be measured by the extent to which specific contract activities were completed. From my perspective, the new executive leadership is challenging the Lab personnel to not only complete specific contract activities but to ensure that those activities are conducted in a manner that is meaningful and that makes a significant difference for the populations whom the Lab serves. Specifically, the current Lab executive leadership is attempting to move the Lab from a contract completion oriented Lab to one that is client and staff oriented—to a Lab that makes a difference.

This attempt to change the organization's culture, as it were, is ambitious and, in my view, is the right thing to do. It is, however, what creates the greatest challenge for the Lab. For example, it is likely that contract activities would have been completed—checked off—as it were had not the internal review revealed significant cause for program redesign and staff reassignment. It is likely that this interim review would have concluded that the Lab was absolutely on target in completing the contract goals and activities of the REL contract.

The Lab's restructuring as a result of the internal review initiated a rethinking of what should be done in each goal area and resulted in the vacancy in leadership of the Lab's specialty area, language and diversity. Making the changes necessary to implement the rethinking, develop modifications and seek approval for those modifications, and to match and select staff to meet expectations has focused Lab leadership on issues other than contract completion. Nevertheless, the executive leadership should be commended for its restructuring efforts. Aggressive action in filling vacancies and taking the next steps to build in collaboration on the part of the executive leadership may yet result in the Lab's achieving its contract goals and in meeting the new higher expectations established by the restructuring. This aggressive action should include:

- Filling vacancies in evaluation and language/diversity

- Increasing collaboration across Lab programs with Lab staff

- Integrating language and diversity across all Lab operations

- Increasing collaboration with regional educational Labs, institutions of higher education and other appropriate educational agencies